4:Belo E-5 (1931-1939) 1949 OF7 Bali OF7

CHAPTER ONE

Balinese Society

To write of Bali, of Balinese society, is not like writing of a primitive society. It is not like a simple piece of whole cloth, to work out the pattern of which it would be sufficient to study the various strands and their interweaving. Balinese society has a number of patternings, which are overlayed upon each other, which are often conflicting, often confusing to the observer for the inconsistencies they necessarily entail. There are no simple, forthright rules which are consistently held to from village to village; there are no hard and fast boundaries of conduct and belief separating off one caste division from another, one social stratum from another, one status from another. It is a society which is both segmented and stratified—and yet to apply to it classificatory terms invented for the description of industrialized western Europe would be meaningless, even misleading. Likewise, to expect to be able to derive from the data on the structure and function of any single group, a geographical unit, a caste unit, a temporal grouping, general principles which would apply throughout the whole, as we could reasonably hope to do for a primitive society, would be equally meaningless and perhaps even more misleading.

There is nonetheless in the Balinese social picture a very definite character, a special Balineseness, which, I believe, carries through the culture at all levels and in all the varieties of its patternings. It is with this character that we are concerned, its psychological makeup, its cultural makeup, its historical antecedents, its ecological setting. To place what is to be said in its social context, it will be necessary first to sketch the nature of the Balinese society.

In Bali today, we can distinguish a number of levels of development, which, though they refer to different periods of the past, coexist in the present. They illustrate, as it were, different strata in the social and historical process. Thus one can still find in the remote mountain areas village communities which bear a strong resemblance to the known patterns of Old Indonesian community organization, common in the simpler cultures throughout the archipelago. One finds throughout Bali named, hereditary guild-caste membership (*pandé*, smith; *pasek*, warrior or guardian), which,

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many hundreds of years static, it has been possible for these laws to grow up, to be sifted and tested over a long period, until they have reached a code eminently suitable to the people whom they govern. For this reason it becomes easy for the child to take over the ways of his elders—the more forcibly impressed upon him because of the weight of tradition behind them, and the fear of transgressing the laws which have been shown by experience to be acceptable to the ever-present gods and demons. Actually the child is afforded no choice at all under the sanction of the community. He has only to obey the prescriptions of tradition to become an adult happily adjusted to the life which is his. And if the child is a girl, she begins very early to feel how her rôle is differentiated from that of a boy. The women accept without rancor the rôle of an inferior. It is simply that they have their being on a different plane from the men. In a society with so many stratifications, that of age within the family, of rank and of relative wealth as between families, the place of woman as an inferior is not seen as a hardship. The system of stratification works smoothly, as a rule, and all those individuals who conform to it seem happy. It is a part of the very order which gives to the life of the Balinese its stability.

When the Rules May Be Broken

The Balinese way of life even provides an organized release from the rigid code, times when individuals who feel the need of it may break almost all the rules of decorum. These are the occasions of intense and fevered group activity. There is no space here to describe these manifestations in detail, and a few examples of what I mean must suffice. In the prolonged and enthusiastic rehearsals of musicians, actors, and dancers, when all work together in a group, no attention is paid to relative rank, and a performer of noble birth takes his place in equality with the group—he sits on a level with his social inferiors, and bows to their will in matters of artistic production, if their talent be superior to his. At communal feasts men who are accustomed to eating in private gather in groups to partake of the unusual viands and delicacies which they have prepared. Here the taboos do not quite break down, for although they regale themselves with relish, no conversation is allowed between the members feasting together. At the celebration of cremations, several hundred men together cast off their habitual carefully poised bearing, and taking up the body of their friend, or the tower which is to convey